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Partition of Czechoslovakia

BY PAUL B. TAYLOR

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Partition of Czechoslovakia: The Sudeten Annexation

BY PAUL B. TAYLOR

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CZECHOSLOVAKIA, which emerged from the peace settlement of 1919 as a vigorous military and industrial power, has been stripped by the Munich accord of one-fifth of its territory and population, and reduced to dependence on Germany. Annexation of the Sudetenland, made ostensibly on the ground of realizing the principle of self-determination, has given Germany its long-sought hegemony in Central and Southeastern Europe, and has completely altered the European balance of power.¹

The Paris Peace Conference had so drawn Czechoslovakia's frontiers as to give it strong defenses and adequate resources, but had at the same time created an acute nationalities problem by including in the new state about 3,500,000 Germans, 700,000 Magyars and 80,000 Poles.² The Germans, who formed a large majority in a territorial belt adjoining the historic Bohemian frontier facing Germany and Austria, were given to Czechoslovakia by the decision of the Conference to maintain that frontier with only slight modifications.³ American proposals to hold a plebiscite in at least one German area were overridden, chiefly because of French insistence that Czechoslovakia should obtain the strong mountain defenses against Germany which lay within the old frontiers. Moreover, the Conference accepted the Czech thesis that Bohemia had, through centuries, become an economic unit which should not be broken up.⁴ Although

Czechoslovakia's minorities policy was generally conceded to be comparatively liberal, the Germans resented their minority status and complained of denationalization by the Czechs. They objected to the privileged position accorded the Czech language, and charged that Czechs were being systematically settled in German areas; were given more than a fair proportion of schools; and were unduly favored in the grant of public contracts, public employment and social relief.⁵

In recent years, German discontent was mobilized by the Nazi-inclined Sudeten German party of Konrad Henlein. This party, formed by Henlein in 1933 in an effort to build a common front of Germans, had polled about 67 per cent of the German votes in the parliamentary elections of 1935. Despite a strong National Socialist trend in the movement, Henlein's earlier pronouncements, especially that made at Böhmisches Leipa on October 21, 1934, expressed his belief in democracy and his opposition to frontier revision as a means of solving the Sudeten German problem.⁶ As his movement expanded, however, Henlein increasingly claimed to represent the entire German community and demanded, in more and more specific terms, national autonomy for the Germans within Czechoslovakia.⁷

The Magyar minority, inhabiting the Slovakian and Ruthenian frontier territory east of Bratislava, had expressed similar grievances regarding use of

1. European diplomacy during the Czechoslovak crisis, as well as the Polish and Hungarian annexations, will be dealt with in forthcoming issues of *Foreign Policy Reports*.

2. According to the 1930 Czech census, the total population of 14,729,536 was distributed as follows: Czechoslovaks, 9,756,604 (67,834 non-citizens), including about 7,400,000 Czechs and 2,300,000 Slovaks; Germans, 3,318,445 (86,757 non-citizens); Magyars, 719,569 (27,646 non-citizens); Ruthenes, 568,941 (19,772 non-citizens); Jews, 190,856 (18,187 non-citizens); Poles, 100,322 (18,585 non-citizens); and about 18,000 of other nationalities.

3. A smaller number of Germans live in mixed-language districts and enclaves in the interior.

4. Cf. Elizabeth Wiskemann, *Czechs and Germans* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1938). For the German view, cf. Dr. H. Raschhofer, *Die Tschechoslowakischen Denkschriften für die Friedenskonferenz von Paris 1919-1920* (Berlin, Heymann, 1937).

5. For discussion of the grievances of the Sudeten Germans (so-called because some of them live in the Sudeten Mountain region), cf. Karl Falk, "Strife in Czechoslovakia: The German Minority Question," *Foreign Policy Reports*, March 15, 1938; Wiskemann, *Czechs and Germans*, cited; Great Britain, Parliament, *Correspondence respecting Czechoslovakia*, Cmd. 5847 (London, H.M. Stationery Office, 1938), pp. 4, 5.

6. *Konrad Henlein spricht* (Karlsbad, K. H. Frank Verlag, 1935). For development of the Sudeten German party, cf. Falk, "Strife in Czechoslovakia," cited, pp. 4-6; Wiskemann, *Czechs and Germans*, cited, pp. 197-206, 235-71.

7. Cf. his speech at Eger, June 21, 1936; Wiskemann, *Czechs and Germans*, cited, p. 249; also for the six bills submitted by Sudeten German representatives to the Czechoslovak Parliament in April 1937, cf. Falk, "Strife in Czechoslovakia," cited, p. 5.

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their language, admission to public employment, educational facilities, and difficulties in obtaining citizenship.⁸ A large majority of the Magyars had never become fully reconciled to inclusion in the Czechoslovak state and desired the return of Slovakia and Ruthenia to Hungary.⁹ The small Polish minority in the Teschen district, awarded to Czechoslovakia by the Conference of Ambassadors, was apparently divided on the question of autonomy.¹⁰

The rearmament of the Third Reich after Hitler's rise to power in 1933 made Czechoslovakia's minorities problem exceedingly dangerous for its security. The Nazi party's cardinal aim in foreign policy was to join to the Reich the Germans left outside its frontiers by the Peace Conference. Germans resented the refusal of self-determination to the Sudeten Germans—who, except for the Austrians, formed the largest compact German population adjoining the Reich—and complained of the Czech minorities policy. Moreover, they objected to Czechoslovakia's military pacts with the Soviet Union and France, claiming that, while those pacts existed, Czechoslovakia was both a threat to German security and an outpost of Bolshevism. According to some military experts, Czechoslovakia's control of the "Bohemian Quadrilateral" made elimination of its military power a primary problem of German strategy in case of a European war between existing coalitions, and an important step toward eastward expansion.¹¹ Control or neutralization of the mountain defense areas of Bohemia—inhabited to a large extent by Sudeten Germans—would assure access to the oil, ores and agricultural products of Southeast Europe. Germans deny any aim of annexing non-Germans to the Reich, however, and believe that close relations with these countries is a natural development which benefits all parties. In addition to Germany's desires, Poland wanted to obtain Teschen, and Hungary wished to regain the Magyar minority and, if possible, all Slovakia and Ruthenia.

Early in 1938, Hitler launched a new policy of military "protection" of Germans in Austria and Czechoslovakia. Following a Cabinet and army shake-up in February, he forced Dr. Schuschnigg,

Austrian Chancellor, to remove the ban on the Nazi party and to admit Nazis into his Cabinet. In a Reichstag speech on February 20, the Führer announced his further aims. Pointing out that ten million Germans were included in "two neighboring states," he declared:

"So long as Germany was itself powerless . . . it simply had to accept many of these continued persecutions of Germans along our frontiers. Only, just as England represents its interests all over the world, so present-day Germany will know how to represent and protect its much more limited interests. And to these interests of the German Reich belong also the protection of those German racial comrades on our borders who are not in a position by themselves to secure general human, political, and *weltanschaulichen* freedom."¹² Field Marshal Göring made an even more pointed threat when, on March 1, he declared: "Since the Führer made the proud statement that we would no longer tolerate that ten million of our German brothers across the frontier should be oppressed—then you know, soldiers of the air force, that if necessary you must stand for this word of the Führer until the end."¹³

Hitler's annexation of Austria on March 12 greatly increased the peril of Czechoslovakia's position. German territory now enveloped its most vital military and industrial areas on three sides, affording bases of attack not only through the northern passes, but also from the south, where Czech frontier defenses were weaker. Moreover, the *Anschluss* caused a surge of pro-Nazi sentiment among Sudeten Germans, and a virtual stampede into the Henlein movement. After an intensive propaganda campaign, the Sudeten German party absorbed the German Agrarian League and Christian Socialist party on March 22 and 23, thus obtaining control of 55 seats in the Chamber of Deputies. The German Social Democratic party withdrew from the Czechoslovak Cabinet, but refused to join the Sudeten German party. Henlein, who by that time represented about 90 per cent of the German voters, called for new elections. On March 29 Ernst Kundt, Sudeten party leader in the Chamber of Deputies, warned the government to grant full autonomy to minorities. Spokesmen for other autonomist groups—the United Magyar parties, the Slovak People's party, and the deputy of the Polish bloc—echoed his claims.¹⁴

8. C. A. Macartney, *Hungary and Her Successors* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1937), pp. 148-90.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 183.

10. Lieut. Commander Edgar P. Young, R.N., *Czechoslovakia: Keystone of Peace and Democracy* (London, Victor Gollancz, 1938), pp. 225-29, 284-91.

11. Cf. R. E. Dupuy and G. F. Eliot, *If War Comes* (New York, Macmillan, 1937), p. 248; Col. Emanuel Moravec, *The Military Importance of Czechoslovakia in Europe* (Prague, Orbis, 1938).

12. *Völkischer Beobachter*, February 21, 1938.

13. *Ibid.*, March 2, 1938.

14. *Prager Presse*, March 30, 31, 1938.

THE KARLSBAD PROGRAM

Threatened by the danger of becoming a second Spain or Austria, the Czechoslovak government at the outset adopted a two-fold policy. On March 4 Premier Hodza answered Hitler's threats by declaring that "protection" of the Sudeten Germans by Hitler would constitute unwarranted interference in Czechoslovakia's domestic affairs and that, if attacked, Czechoslovakia would defend itself.¹⁵ France gave assurances, on February 27 and March 14, that it would honor its treaties by coming to Czechoslovakia's help in case of unprovoked aggression. The Soviet Union made a similar promise on March 16, on condition that France simultaneously come to the aid of Prague.¹⁶ Prime Minister Chamberlain offered no such guarantee but, in a statement to the House of Commons on March 24, warned that Britain might be drawn into any war involving France.¹⁷

In the second place, the Czech government, addressing itself to the minorities, offered to hasten and extend the program of concessions which it had begun some time before—particularly that embodied in the agreement of February 18, 1937 with the German Activist parties. That agreement had sought to remove administrative discriminations in the allotment of public works contracts as well as funds for social relief, cultural and educational functions; to give Germans a "just proportion" of state offices, conditional on the applicant's competence, knowledge of languages, and loyalty; and to reduce language discriminations by providing translations of official documents for minority communes. Its provisions had not greatly reduced the general unemployment in German areas, and had not brought many more Germans into the public service. Czechs contended that attainment of the proper proportion of Germans as public servants was necessarily slow because, during earlier years, Germans had let state jobs go by default to Czechs, who could not be removed overnight from their

posts; that German applicants frequently could not fulfill language requirements; and that the Sudeten German party opposed the appointment of any Germans outside its membership.¹⁸ The government, however, now proposed to carry out the proportionality principle and further reduce the advantages of the Czech language over others.¹⁹ On March 28 Premier Hodza announced the government's intention to codify in a single "nationalities statute" all of the legal provisions in force which affected minorities.²⁰ Moreover, it was intimated that additional powers would be granted to local government bodies.²¹ On March 31, confronted by growing disorders in the German areas, Dr. Hodza prohibited political demonstrations for a month. He agreed, however, to hold during May and June the municipal elections which had been postponed from the previous autumn.

Henlein laid down his new terms in a speech at Karlsbad on April 24. He declared that, to achieve friendly relations with the German nation as a whole, Czechs must revise

1. The "mistaken Czech historical myth."

2. "The unfortunate conception that it is the duty of the Czech nation to be the Slav bulwark against the so-called German *Drang nach Osten*."

3. The foreign policy based on the pacts with the Soviet Union and France.

Further, in a series of eight points, he demanded that, in order to insure "a peaceful development in the Czechoslovak state," the Sudeten Germans be given home rule in their own territory; that new safeguards against denationalization be established; that full restitution be made for injustices to Germans since 1918; and that Germans gain complete freedom to express the German outlook. "In common with Germandom throughout the world," he said, "we profess the fundamental National Socialist view of life."²² Reich officials had probably been consulted in advance concerning this speech;²³ and German spokesmen indicated that the Reich had adopted a policy of securing fulfillment of the demands.

The Czech government emphatically rejected the most drastic of these demands, especially territorial

15. *Ibid.*, March 5, 1938. At the time of the Austrian annexation, Germany disclaimed any aggressive aims toward Czechoslovakia; during the same month, it denied any intention to mix in Czech domestic affairs. *Ibid.*, March 29, 1938.

16. Royal Institute of International Affairs (London), *Bulletin of International News*, April 2, 1938, p. 4. In the treaty of October 16, 1925 between France and Czechoslovakia, each party had agreed to come to the other's support in case of an unprovoked attack by Germany where the League Council could not reach a unanimous decision, under Article XV of the Covenant, concerning the facts of the dispute. The mutual assistance pact of May 16, 1935 between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union contained similar provisions, but bound each party to help the other only "in so far as assistance may be rendered by France to the Party victim of aggression." League of Nations, *Treaty Series*, Volume 159, pp. 357-61.

17. *The Times* (London), March 25, 1938.

18. Cf. Wiskemann, *Czechs and Germans*, cited, pp. 254-57.

19. For Cabinet decision of March 18 on the proportionality question, cf. *Prager Presse*, March 19, 1938.

20. *Ibid.*, March 29, 1938.

21. Czechoslovakia had a highly centralized government system modeled largely on that of France.

22. *Völkischer Beobachter*, April 25, 1938.

23. *New York Times*, April 23, 24, 28, 1938. Hans Krebs, a Henleinist who had fled to the Reich, was appointed by the Reich Nazi party a Nazi district leader without a district.

autonomy and restitution for post-war injustices. Czechs believed that Henlein demanded no mere corrective to over-centralization, but the handing over of territory to a party which had just announced its allegiance to a foreign state hostile to Czechoslovakia, with power to practice National Socialism. They contended that the vague demand for "restitution" implied German domination, and showed that no reasonable concessions could secure German good will. Meanwhile, the Henleinists, strongly influenced if not directed from Berlin, and convinced that the Reich could "liberate" them, refused to discuss terms less drastic than the Karlsbad demands.

During the London conference of April 27-29 the British and French governments agreed to seek the cooperation of Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary in solving the Czech minority problem.²⁴ On May 2 Lord Halifax told Jan Masaryk, Czech Minister in London, that the concessions offered by Prague were too limited, and on May 7 the British and French Ministers advised Prague to give the Sudeten Germans the widest concessions compatible with the integrity of the state.²⁵ On the other hand, Britain urged Germany to moderate Henlein's demands, and warned that "rough handling" of the minorities issue might precipitate war.²⁶

THE MAY 21 CRISIS

The Prague government's ban on political meetings and demonstrations was lifted on May 7 in preparation for the municipal elections to be held on May 22, May 29 and June 12. Clashes between Henleinists and Czechs immediately began to take place.²⁷ Nazi crowds attacked Czechoslovak troop garrisons and gendarmes, giving rise to the suspicion that they were preparing to demand that these forces be removed from "German soil."^{27a} On May 13 the Sudeten German party announced the creation of a force analogous to Hitler's Storm Troops, called the *Freiwilliger Deutscher Schutzdienst* (or F.S.), which was "no parade troop, but a fighting body, constantly in service." Its opponents charged that it tried to usurp police functions. As the first

elections approached, Henleinist bands apparently provoked minor incidents against Czechs and German Social Democrats.²⁸

On May 19 reports began to circulate in Europe regarding German troop movements in the direction of Czechoslovakia.²⁹ The British Ambassador at Berlin inquired regarding these reports, and was told that only routine troop movements had taken place.³⁰ According to Dr. Krofta, Czech Foreign Minister, the Czech Minister at Berlin was told that although the troop movements were not directed at Czechoslovakia, Germany would march "to rescue" the Sudeten Germans unless Prague altered its policy toward them.³¹ These threats, combined with growing violence in the Sudeten areas, suggested the possibility of a Sudeten revolt supported by the Reich army. During the night of May 20, the Czech Cabinet decided that the Minister of War should summon one class of reserves and deputy reserves, plus specialist troops from many classes, for "extraordinary maneuvers."³² Within a few hours, strong forces were stationed along the German frontier. This action, following months of growing nervousness in all Europe over the danger of a Czech-German conflict, occasioned a serious war scare. The French government declared its intention to fulfill its obligations to Czechoslovakia, but urged Prague again to make concessions to the German minority. The British government made strong representations against war both at Prague and at Berlin.³³ The German press complained that the incident had been invented by the Czechs and British. In his Nuremberg speech of September 12, Hitler also denied that unusual troop movements had taken place. He stated, however, that since "a great power cannot accept a second time such a mean assault" he ordered on May 29 a sharp increase in the army and air force, and the rapid completion of Germany's western fortifications.³⁴ This seems to indicate that the events of May 21 convinced the Führer that his aims regarding Czechoslovakia could not be attained except by war or a serious threat of war. Whether or not Germany had actually planned an attack, the Prague government's action restored its

24. *Bulletin of International News*, May 7, 1938, p. 9. On May 24 Prime Minister Chamberlain had declared that "now is the time when all the resources of diplomacy should be enlisted" to solve the problem; said he "observed with satisfaction" that the Czech government was taking steps "within the framework of the . . . constitution" to meet "reasonable wishes of the German minority"; and offered British help toward a solution. *The Times*, March 25, 1938.

25. *New York Times*, May 3, 8, 1938.

26. *Ibid.*, May 7, 1938.

27. *New York Herald Tribune*, May 10, 1938.

27a. *New York Times*, May 12, 18, 1938.

28. *Ibid.*, May 19, 20, 21, 1938.

29. Cf. statement of Prime Minister Chamberlain in the House of Commons on May 23, *The Times*, May 24, 1938.

30. *New York Herald Tribune*, May 22, 1938.

31. *New York Times*, June 22, 1938. Cf. also *Prager Rundschau*, 1938, Heft 4, p. 285.

32. *New York Times*, May 22, 1938. Formal mobilization was thus avoided.

33. *Ibid.*, May 22, 1938. It was reported to have repeated at Berlin the substance of Prime Minister Chamberlain's statement of March 24, 1938.

34. *Ibid.*, September 13, 1938.

authority in the Sudeten regions, thereby forestalling disorders which might have led to intervention, and served notice on other powers that the Czechs expected to defend themselves against invasion.³⁵

CZECH NEGOTIATIONS WITH MINORITIES

On May 20 Dr. Hodza declared that the government was ready to negotiate with minority groups on the new nationalities statute, but would suppress every attempt at coercion or disorder.³⁶ The Henlein party, which, according to Czechs, polled 82 to 85 per cent of the German vote in the communal elections,³⁷ refused to confer with the authorities, however, so long as the military measures were in effect. Through British efforts a conference was arranged on May 23, at which Henlein failed to secure the withdrawal of troops, but nevertheless agreed to submit concrete proposals based on the eight Karlsbad demands.³⁸ This was done in a detailed memorandum of June 7.

The Sudeten German party "sketch" called for a drastic decentralization of the government which would, in effect, transfer most public powers from the Czech and Slovak majorities to the national groups. Each nationality would become a legal person and would keep a list (*Kataster*) of all its members. New "boundary lines," drawn on a nationality basis, would divide local government jurisdictions. Voters of each nationality would elect a *curia*, which would act both as its local legislature and as its delegation in the National Assembly. These *curiae* would take over most legislative powers from the central government, and would control local administration. The National Assembly could enact framework legislation on some local subjects, and legislate generally on subjects not delegated to the *curiae*. Cabinet members in the central government would be responsible not to the Chamber of Deputies, but to their own *curiae*. Some ministries would be abolished; in all others, except the ministries of national defense and foreign affairs, national sections would be created.

On June 8 Kundt asked whether the government proposed to base negotiations on its nationalities

statute or on the Sudeten party plan, declaring that in the former case, the party would "reserve its judgment." Although Premier Hodza still refused to consider territorial autonomy, he stated that the Henleinist plan would form the basis of negotiations along with the government drafts.³⁹

Father Hlinka's Slovak People's party, which had made common cause with the minorities, renewed on June 4 its old demand for Slovak autonomy. On June 5 it published a bill it planned to introduce in Parliament, providing that a Slovak Diet be created, having wide legislative powers; that Slovak be made the official language in Slovakia; that Slovak soldiers serve only in formations stationed there; and that in the Prague Parliament all bills concerning Slovakia require a majority of Slovak deputies and senators.⁴⁰ The United Magyar parties apparently framed their demands to harmonize with those of the Germans and the Slovak autonomists.⁴¹

On June 11 Premier Hodza stated that, since differences were not great on such questions as language rights and proportionality in state employment, the essential problem in negotiations was the extent of home rule to be granted.⁴² On June 30 the government handed to the Sudeten party delegation a part of the nationalities statute and a language bill, but not the home rule proposals.⁴³ It began to intimate, however, that in case of a breakdown of negotiations with the minorities, it would put its own proposals into force.

Although the German government precipitated no new crisis during June and July, it maintained its menacing attitude toward Czechoslovakia and did not dispel the apprehension that it would try to force a solution by autumn. The Reich's distrust of the Czech government was made even deeper by the latter's slowness in meeting in full the demands of the Sudeten Germans. Its press and radio kept up a steady campaign of hatred against Czechoslovakia, magnifying minor incidents which occurred despite the evident efforts of Prague to restrain its officials and populace from provocation, and representing them as Czech or Bolshevik atrocities against innocent and defenseless Germans. It seemed obvious that Dr. Goebbels's propaganda ministry was whipping up warlike feeling against Czechoslovakia.

The British government was evidently alarmed

35. On June 3 Dr. Hodza stated that about 49,000 soldiers had been released from service.

36. *Prager Presse*, May 21, 1938.

37. *L'Europe Centrale*, June 18, 1938, pp. 389-90. By excluding Communist votes, Germans arrive at a figure of over 90 per cent. Henleinist gains were made at the expense of the Communist and Activist parties.

38. Cf. speech of Kundt on August 17, *Völkischer Beobachter*, August 18, 1938. For the part played by the British, cf. Chamberlain's speech on May 23, *The Times*, May 24, 1938. Just before the June 12 election, the British government appointed, with Czechoslovakia's assent, two of its representatives to act as observers in the Sudeten area. *New York Times*, June 12, 1938.

39. *Prager Presse*, June 16, 1938.

40. *The Times*, June 6, 1938.

41. Cf. *Pester Lloyd*, July 30, 1938.

42. *Bulletin of International News*, June 18, 1938, p. 5.

43. Cf. statement of Kundt, *Völkischer Beobachter*, August 18, 1938. The Hungarians appear to have received the proposals at about the same time.

by the lack of progress in negotiations between the Czech government and the minorities. Although it had made no specific proposals to Dr. Hodza, it had urged him to submit his plans to Henlein before introducing them in Parliament.⁴⁴⁻⁴⁵ On July 26, however, Mr. Chamberlain announced that Lord Runciman would be sent to Czechoslovakia in an unofficial capacity to investigate and, if possible, to mediate between the government and the minorities. The German government, when asked to support mediation, "reserved its attitude."⁴⁶ Charged with sending Runciman to "hustle the Czechs," the Prime Minister declared that his "anxiety has been rather that the Czechoslovak government should be too hasty in dealing with a situation of such delicacy that it was most desirable that the two sides should not get into a position where they were set and unable to have any further give and take between them."⁴⁷ Mr. Chamberlain and his colleagues apparently feared that in case of a breakdown of negotiations with the Sudeten German party, the Czech leaders would promptly present their proposals to the Prague Parliament for enactment, thus offering a challenge to Germany. British Cabinet members revealed their belief that government decentralization—analagous, perhaps, to Irish home-rule provisions—was necessary in Czechoslovakia.⁴⁸

THE RUNCIMAN MISSION

The Czechoslovak government, probably intending to forestall any attempt by Runciman to substitute more drastic British proposals as a basis of negotiation, promptly revealed the general nature of its plans for administrative reform, declaring that they were not yet complete. The plans provided for a considerable devolution of power from Prague to the provincial and local bodies. The provincial assemblies would become Diets and would receive added power over a variety of matters. As a concession to the Sudeten party demand for purely national "self-administration," the representatives of each nationality in each provincial diet would form a *curia* to deal with certain matters concerning the nationality. In each Diet, as a whole, Germans, Hungarians and Poles could always be outvoted. The administrative powers of the provincial governments would also be extended.⁴⁹

In presenting its plan to the minorities, the government announced that the proposals, together with those of the minorities, would form the basis of immediate negotiations on details.⁵⁰ These negotiations moved forward slowly, under difficulties. The government attempted to deal separately with the Slovak and Ruthenian autonomists who were using German pressure to secure their long-sought aims.⁵¹ Dr. Hodza's coalition looked with suspicion on serious concessions,^{51a} and was reported to have developed differences of opinion. Kundt, while criticizing the government's policy as dilatory,⁵² refused to be drawn into detailed discussions of government drafts with Czech experts until the broad demands of the Sudeten party had been accepted. Moreover, the Sudeten party had an extreme wing, apparently bent on annexation and determined to obstruct negotiations. Henlein's own position was far from clear.⁵³ As early as August 1, the Sudeten party had issued a brochure, rejecting the language and nationalities bills as falling short of the Karlsbad demands.⁵⁴ Although Dr. Hodza said that about 50 per cent of the Sudeten party demands of June 7 were acceptable, 25 per cent could be discussed, and 25 per cent—including territorial autonomy and restitution—could not, the negotiations finally broke down after a long meeting on August 17.⁵⁵

By this time, Germany's threat of war against Czechoslovakia had markedly increased. Early in August the Reich government announced that the annual army maneuvers would begin on August 15 and last for a month and, despite earlier reports, would involve over a million men. Reservists were

50. This was termed the "second stage" of proceedings. *Prager Presse*, July 31, 1938.

51. Although Ruthenia had been included in Czechoslovakia under a guarantee of local autonomy with a separate Diet, autonomy had never been given. Macartney, *Hungary and Her Successors*, cited, p. 224.

51a. Lord Runciman states that as late as the time of his mission, he could "find no readiness" on the part of the Czech government to remedy the Sudeten complaints "on anything like an adequate scale." *Correspondence respecting Czechoslovakia*, cited, p. 5.

52. Cf. his questions to Hodza, *Völkischer Beobachter*, July 31, 1938. On August 10, the government proposals still lacked chapters on the powers of communes, while those on provincial and district governments were still in rough outline. Cf. Kundt's speech, *Völkischer Beobachter*, August 18, 1938.

53. Although he apparently expressed moderate autonomist views on visits to England, he obviously gave much support to the annexationist group in his party. Lord Runciman said, however, that at the time of his arrival "the more moderate Sudeten leaders still desired a settlement within the frontiers of the Czechoslovak state." Cf. *Correspondence respecting Czechoslovakia*, cited, p. 5.

54. *Völkischer Beobachter*, August 2, 1938.

55. Cf. *Prager Presse*, *Völkischer Beobachter*, August 18, 1938, for supplementary reports of the meeting.

44-45. Cf. Prime Minister Chamberlain's speech of July 26, *The Times*, July 27, 1938.

46. Cf. Prime Minister Chamberlain's speech of September 28, *ibid.*, September 29, 1938.

47. *Ibid.*, July 27, 1938.

48. Cf. Lord Halifax's speech of July 27, *ibid.*, July 28, 1938.

49. *New York Herald Tribune*, July 27, 1938.

called up and recruits were required to serve beyond the regular term ending on October 1. At about the same time it was reported that fortifications were being built on the western front at a feverish pace with conscripted labor, and that the government had issued decrees providing for the conscription of civilian goods and services.⁵⁶ These measures appeared even more threatening in view of the approaching Nuremberg Party Congress from September 5 to 12 with its usual chauvinist enthusiasm, and of German threats, made intermittently since spring, that the Czechoslovak question had to be "solved" by autumn.⁵⁷ Germans state that during August the Reich government had resolved to annex the Sudeten German areas instead of merely obtaining autonomy for them.

With the breakdown of negotiations between the Czech government and the Sudeten party on August 17, however, Lord Runciman undertook to find a basis for the resumption of conversations.⁵⁸ After additional Germans were appointed to administrative posts,⁵⁹ President Benes agreed on August 21 to still further concessions.⁶⁰ A new plan—"Plan No. 3"—was prepared to meet the German demand for national self-government. Reports disagree as to whether it was ever submitted to the minorities;⁶¹ in any case, it was quickly superseded by events. Lord Runciman, although somewhat encouraged by an apparent response to his efforts, felt the need of going over the heads of the Sudeten party leaders to secure Hitler's cooperation. Accordingly, Henlein visited Hitler at Berchtesgaden on September 1, with a letter from Runciman, urging the Führer to give his support to the negotiations at Prague. Henlein returned without an answer, but "convinced of Herr Hitler's desire for a peaceful solution."⁶² The Czech government submitted its last proposal—"Plan No. 4"—to Lord Runciman on September 5, and to the Sudeten party on September 6. In his report, Lord Runciman said: "In my opinion—and, I believe, in the opinion of the more responsible Sudeten leaders—this plan embodied almost all the requirements of the Karlsbad

eight points and with a little clarification and extension could have been made to cover them in their entirety."⁶³

The plan embodied the substance of the Nazi demand for "self-government" by providing for the erection of *Gaue*, or cantons, whose boundaries would follow nationality lines, and which would have legislatures elected by proportional representation. In general, all functions not considered essential for the unity and security of the state would be transferred from the central government to the cantons, and police functions would be divided between state gendarmerie and local police. Although the central government would not be broken up along national lines as in the Sudeten party proposals, national sections would be created in important administrative departments to deal with questions affecting separate nationalities.

Each nationality would have a claim to all kinds of state employment in proportion to its percentage of the total population. This proportion would, for Germans, be attained in 10 years. Political affiliation would not be a factor in appointments—although it is hard to see how, with a single Nazi canton, this could be avoided. The principle of proportionality would be observed also in the education, social welfare, and public health departments; and in the grant of state contracts with respect to the number both of concerns and of employees, according to the state funds spent.

The plan incorporated the proposal of the German Social Democrats that a government loan of a billion crowns be granted for the assistance of distressed areas, 70 per cent to go to German districts. A new language law would establish complete equality of the Czechoslovak, German, Polish, Hungarian and Ruthenian languages in official matters. Necessary laws would be drafted by a joint government and Sudeten party commission. Immediate steps would be taken to carry the whole plan into effect; meanwhile, party propaganda should be moderated.⁶⁴

It is obvious that, in conceding such far-reaching autonomy to the Sudeten Germans, the Czechoslovak government was taking a grave risk. Adoption of the new system would have required much good will and loyalty to the state on all sides. Success would have been almost unthinkable unless Germany accepted the plan, demobilized its army, and joined in a genuine guarantee of Czechoslovakia by the great powers. In fact, it proved to be impossible because the Reich government—and, as a

56. The British government inquired regarding the purpose of the move, but Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop refused to discuss the question. Cf. Prime Minister Chamberlain's speech of September 28, *The Times*, September 29, 1938.

57. *Ibid.*

58. Cf. *Correspondence respecting Czechoslovakia*, cited, pp. 3, 4.

59. *Prager Presse*, August 20, 1938.

60. Cf. Prime Minister Chamberlain's speech on September 28, *The Times*, September 29, 1938.

61. For details, cf. *Völkischer Beobachter*, August 27, 1938; *Pester Lloyd*, September 1, 1938.

62. Speech of Prime Minister Chamberlain of September 28, *The Times*, September 29, 1938.

63. *Correspondence respecting Czechoslovakia*, cited, p. 4.

64. For general summary, cf. *New York Times*, September 8, 1938.

subsidiary factor, the extreme wing of the Sudeten party—had, in view of the apparent unwillingness of Britain and France to fight, decided on annexation.⁶⁵ Henlein and a Sudeten delegation attended the Nazi Party Congress which opened at Nuremberg on September 5. The Reich press immediately condemned the Fourth Plan, claimed that the Czech government had lost control over its police, and launched an increasingly warlike agitation. Although Kundt had agreed to resume negotiations with Prague, Henlein party headquarters used a slight clash at Moravska Ostrava between Czech police and several Sudeten party deputies as a pretext to break them off again.⁶⁶ Even after the Czech government gave way to the Sudeten party demands and discussions were resumed on September 10, Sudeten extremists immediately “provoked and instigated” further incidents.⁶⁷

HITLER'S NUREMBERG SPEECH

On September 12 Hitler closed the Nuremberg Congress with a fighting speech, in which he implied a threat of war if necessary to give the Sudeten Germans their right of “self-determination.” Attacking Czechoslovakia and President Benes for “persecutions” of the Sudeten Germans, he exclaimed: “I can only say this is not a matter of indifference to us, and I say that if these tortured creatures can find no rights and no help themselves, they will get both from us. . . . The poor Arabs are defenseless and perhaps forsaken. The Germans in Czechoslovakia are neither defenseless nor are they forsaken. One may as well take note of that.”⁶⁸

At the end of the speech, crowds in many Sudeten towns were led by Henleinists in outbreaks obviously planned beforehand in expectation of military help from the Reich. Fighting took place between Henleinists, armed with modern German weapons, and Czech gendarmes and troops. The government sent reinforcements to the disturbed districts and, beginning on September 13, imposed *Standrecht*, a form of martial law, in all of them.

65. *Correspondence respecting Czechoslovakia*, cited. Despite his efforts to promote the Fourth Plan, Lord Runciman did not consider it a lasting solution. In his report, he proposed the cession, without plebiscite, of areas with “important German majorities” and the grant, in areas where the German minority was “not so important,” of local autonomy along the lines of the Fourth Plan. His political proposals—which seem to go beyond his duties as mediator between the government and the minorities—included a Czech ban on agitation against “neighbors,” the denunciation of its military pacts in return for a guarantee by the powers, and a preferential trade treaty with Germany. *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

66. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 4, which terms this an “excuse.”

67. *Ibid.*

68. For text, cf. *New York Times*, September 13, 1938.

Henlein and Frank, his extremist lieutenant, sent an “ultimatum,” demanding in effect that most of the government authority in the Sudeten areas be turned over to them. The government prepared to accept these terms on condition that a Sudeten party representative come to Prague to discuss their fulfillment. The same night, Henlein refused this condition and broke off negotiations. “Responsibility for the final break must, in my opinion,” said Lord Runciman, “rest upon Herr Henlein and Herr Frank and upon those of their supporters inside and outside the country who were urging them to extreme unconstitutional action.”⁶⁹ Premier Hodza extended martial law until it was in force throughout most of the German areas. As the government’s forces re-established its authority, Henlein fled to the Reich and, on September 15, issued a proclamation declaring that German and Czech populations could no longer live side by side in the same state and that the Sudeten Germans now wanted to “go home to the Reich.” The government promptly ordered his arrest for organizing a revolt, proclaimed the dissolution of the F.S.—his storm troops—and disbanded the Sudeten German party as a subversive organization.⁷⁰

After a reported conflict with army leaders who opposed war, Hitler apparently decided to fulfill his threat to use force if necessary.^{70a} By September 14 German troops were drawn up along the Czechoslovak frontier.⁷¹ The following day Prime Minister Chamberlain, carrying out a plan which he “had had in mind for a considerable period as a last resort,” flew to Germany and at Berchtesgaden ascertained Hitler’s demands.

“At this conversation,” said Mr. Chamberlain, “I very soon became aware the situation was much more acute and much more urgent than I had realized. . . . Herr Hitler made it plain that he had made up his mind that the Sudeten Germans must have the right of self-determination and of returning, if they wished, to the Reich. If they could not achieve this by their own efforts, he said, he would assist them to do so and he declared categorically that, rather than wait, he would be prepared to risk a world war. . . . So strongly did I get the impression that the Chancellor was contemplating an immediate invasion of Czechoslovakia that I asked him why he had allowed me to

69. *Correspondence respecting Czechoslovakia*, cited, p. 4.

70. In order, apparently, to keep the Sudeten Germans in a state of revolt, the Sudeten emigrés announced on September 17 that they had organized a Free Corps which would fight along the border and in Czechoslovak territory. Sporadic attacks were actually made on a small scale.

70a. On October 31 General Beck, Chief of Staff, resigned. *New York Times*, November 1, 1938; *L’Europe Nouvelle*, October 8, 1938.

71. Cf. Prime Minister Chamberlain’s speech of September 28, *The Times*, September 29, 1938.

travel all the way, since I evidently was wasting my time. He said if I could give him there and then the assurance the British government accepted the principle of self-determination he was quite ready to discuss ways and means of carrying it out.

"If on the contrary, I told him such a principle could not be considered by the British government, then he agreed it was no use to continue our conversations. . . . I undertook to return at once to consult my colleagues if he would refrain from active hostilities until I had had time to obtain their reply.

"That assurance he gave, provided, he said, nothing happened in Czechoslovakia of such a nature as to force his hand."⁷²

At meetings between Chamberlain, Halifax, Premier Daladier and Foreign Minister Bonnet on September 18 and 19, the British and French governments accepted "the principle of self-determination" and on September 19 presented joint proposals at Prague. The Anglo-French plan stated that "the maintenance of peace and the safety of Czechoslovakia's vital interests cannot effectively be assured" without cession of the Sudeten German area; and that the cession "would probably have to include areas with over 50 per cent German inhabitants, but we should hope to arrange by negotiations provisions for adjustment of frontiers, where circumstances render it necessary, by some international body, including a Czech representative. . . ." The plan proposed that the transfer take place without plebiscite, but that populations be exchanged. The United Kingdom offered to join in an international guarantee of the new boundaries of the Czechoslovak state against unprovoked aggression in return for the abandonment of Czechoslovakia's existing military alliances. Czechoslovakia was urged to reply at the earliest possible moment.⁷³ Receiving a somewhat indefinite answer, proposing arbitration, the British government on September 20 instructed its Minister, jointly with the French Minister, to demand that the Czech government withdraw its reply and accept the Anglo-French plan as the only means of avoiding an immediate German invasion. The two governments declined any responsibility for the consequences of Czech refusal.⁷⁴ The ultimatum was delivered to President Benes at 2 a.m. September 21 and was accepted "immediately and uncondition-

ally" late that day.⁷⁵ Dr. Benes' surrender to these terms surprised and shocked the Czech public, which had believed that its government could, by defending itself alone against attack, ultimately force France and Britain to support it even though Britain had refused all such obligations apart from the League Covenant. On September 22 the Hodza government was forced to resign. The new government, headed by General Jan Syrový, Inspector General of the Army, did not repudiate its predecessor's acceptance of the Anglo-French plan.

Chamberlain flew to Godesberg to meet Hitler on September 22, with proposals for fulfillment of the Berchtesgaden terms. Hitler, surprised at their acceptance, rejected the British proposals and laid down severe conditions of his own. First, he declared his support for Poland's and Hungary's demands on Czechoslovakia, made on September 20 and 22, for treatment of their minorities equal to that given Germany. Second, he submitted a memorandum calling for German occupation by October 1 of territories which included some Czech majorities, cut Czechoslovakia's chief railways and crippled its defenses. A plebiscite was to be held by November 25 in areas to be later defined, in which persons resident on October 28, 1918—the official date of Czech independence—or born there before that date could vote. All "military, commercial or traffic establishments" and "all commercial and traffic materials," especially rolling stock and utility services, in the occupied areas were to be surrendered without damage; and no "foodstuffs, goods, cattle, raw materials, etc." could be removed.⁷⁶ Mr. Chamberlain, "shocked" at these conditions, refused to urge Prague to accept them, and Britain and France notified it that they could no longer advise it not to mobilize. Czechoslovakia rejected the demands as "a de facto ultimatum" going far beyond the Anglo-French plan,⁷⁷ and mobilized on September 23. Confronted by Hitler's apparent determination to attack, France on September 23 assured Czechoslovakia of its support, and on September 26 the British Foreign Office declared that if this occurred, Britain and the Soviet Union would stand by France.⁷⁸ Mr. Chamberlain, however, sent Sir Horace Wilson to Berlin with a letter proposing a Czech-German conference for settling details of the Anglo-French plan. When Hitler refused, declaring his intention to mobilize

72. *New York Times*, September 29, 1938.

73. *Correspondence respecting Czechoslovakia*, cited, pp. 8-9. The plan differed from the proposals of Lord Runciman (cf. footnote 65), which were dated two days later. In the crisis, British proposals were probably determined by the Cabinet rather than by Runciman.

74. *New York Times*, October 6, 1938. According to the Czech government, the two powers refused to aid it in the event of an attack resulting from rejection of the terms. *Ibid.*, September 22, 1938.

75. Speech of Prime Minister Chamberlain, September 28, *The Times*, September 29, 1938. According to reports, President Benes was given two hours to accept. *New York Times*, October 16, 1938.

76. *Correspondence respecting Czechoslovakia*, cited, pp. 14-16.

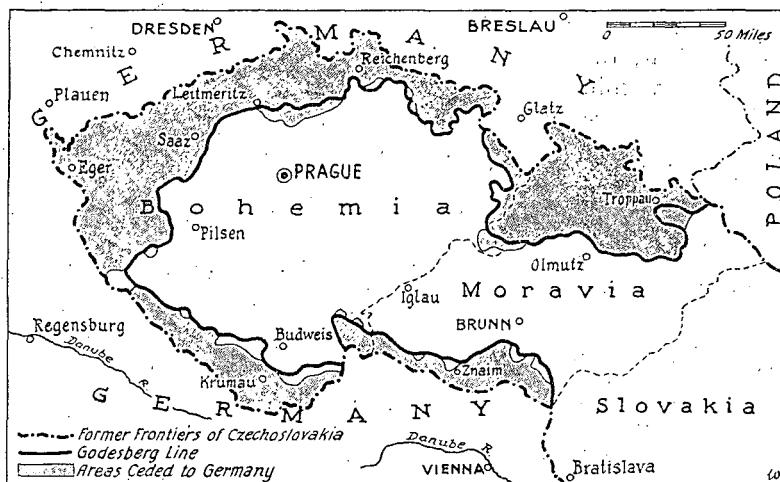
77. *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

78. *New York Times*, September 27, 1938.

on September 28 at 2 p.m.,⁷⁹ Chamberlain offered to guarantee Czechoslovakia's execution of the Anglo-French plan and, at the same time, asked Mussolini to support a new proposal for a four-power conference. Finally, Hitler promised Mussolini to delay mobilization 24 hours and, on September 28, when a European war seemed imminent, agreed to attend the conference at Munich the following day. Early on September 30 Chamberlain, Hitler, Daladier and Mussolini signed an agreement which, when carried out, conformed in almost every respect to the Godesberg terms.

THE MUNICH ACCORD

The Munich agreement provided that Germany should occupy the areas ascertained by an international commission to be "of predominantly German character" in five stages to be completed on October 10. Four zones—containing large German majorities—would be occupied one by one through October 7; the remaining German territory would be determined by the commission—consisting of the German Secretary of State of the Foreign Office, the British, French and Italian Ambassadors at Berlin, and a Czech representative—and be occupied by October 10. The commission was charged with determining the areas in which a plebiscite would be held by November 30 under supervision of an international force, and with fixing the voting conditions on the basis of the provisions for the Saar plebiscite in 1935. The agreement granted a right of option in and out of the ceded territory. Instead of the 12 months provided in the Versailles Treaty, only 6 months were allowed for the option. The commission was authorized to delimit the final boundaries, and to recommend to the four powers "minor modifications" in the ethnographical determination of the zones to be transferred without plebiscite. The Czech government was required to release Sudeten Germans serving in its military and police forces or in prison for political offenses. In signing the Munich accord, Britain repeated its offer to join in a guarantee of Czechoslovakia's new boundaries, while Germany and Italy refused guarantees pending settlement of the Polish and Hungarian claims. The four powers agreed to meet again to deal with these claims if



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not settled within three months.⁸⁰ Seeing no prospect of help by any power, Czechoslovakia on the same day accepted the Munich terms.

The German army occupied the first four districts—which contain large German majorities—between October 1 and October 7. By that time, the international commission at Berlin had delimited the final occupation zone. Over Czech protests, it determined the "preponderantly German" areas according to the status of October 28, 1918—hence by the Austro-Hungarian census of 1910 rather than by the Czech census of 1930.⁸¹ On October 13 it announced that no plebiscite would be held, and that the limits of the final zone marked the permanent frontier. The frontier deviates little from Hitler's Godesberg military occupation line, and includes within Germany considerable areas where Czechs form a large majority. The most important of these are a section reaching from near Zamberk, on the northern frontier, southeast toward Olomouc; the frontier area east of Troppau to Moravska Ostrava; and a number of key towns in southeastern Moravia.⁸² Czechs estimate that areas containing over 750,000 Czechs have been ceded, while about 250,000 Germans remain in Czechoslovakia. The Reich claims to have acquired only 200,000 Czechs and justifies the use of the 1910 census on the grounds of the "Czechization" policies pursued since 1918. Czechs complain, however, that the 1910 census did not, even at that time, register

80. Great Britain, Parliament, *Further Documents respecting Czechoslovakia*, Cmd. 5848 (London, H.M. Stationery Office, 1938).

81. The Munich agreement provided that the "conditions of the Saar plebiscite"—in which voting was limited to residents of the districts at the time of the signature of the Versailles Treaty—should be taken as a basis for the plebiscite.

82. Germany thus gained a territory of 10,885 square miles, containing a population of about 3,585,000.

79. Cf. Mr. Chamberlain's speech of September 28, *The Times*, September 29, 1938.

the strength of the nationalities fairly, since it ascertained only the "habitual language" of the inhabitants, and minorities were under some pressure to give German as their language. Moreover, they charge that it measured the results of centuries of "Germanization" and that Czech population increases since then have resulted largely from economic developments rather than from deliberate "Czechization."⁸³ The use of the 1910 census also had a drastic effect on Czechoslovakia's rail communications. Cession of the area north from Zwickau, which would have been in doubt if present population figures had been considered, cut the main railway line east from Prague; that of Lundenburg severed direct rail communications between Bohemia and Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia and the main Czechoslovak port on the Danube.⁸⁴ Czechs claim that Germany has taken 251 communes which were mainly Czech even in 1910, and that the areas left to Czechoslovakia which had German majorities in the same year do not offset this loss.^{84a}

Although Britain announced on October 4 that its guarantee of Czechoslovakia's frontiers was already in force, this guarantee did not prevent Czechoslovakia from quickly becoming a satellite of Germany. Apparently the British and French representatives on the international commission at Berlin took little active part in decisions, leaving the Germans largely free to dictate terms to the Czechs.⁸⁵ German spokesmen intimated that "reparations" might be demanded—a threat which seemed designed to compel Czechoslovakia to accept German economic proposals. The unsettled territorial claims of Poland and Hungary forced the Czechs even more fully under German control. On October 4 the Cabinet was reconstituted, with members thought *persona grata* to Germany, and on October 5 President Benes resigned. The government harmonized its foreign policy—and, increasingly, its domestic policy—with that of Germany. On October 1 it had introduced compulsory labor service. After the beginning of the German occupation it sought to prevent refugees from leaving the ceded areas and, in many cases, returned those who had already fled. On October 20, after a

visit by Foreign Minister Chvalkovsky to Germany, the Czechoslovak Communist party was dissolved, and on the following day the government notified the Soviet Minister that it had no further interest in its mutual assistance pact with the Soviet Union.⁸⁶

CONCLUSION

The Third Reich's demands, first for Sudeten German autonomy and the renunciation of the Soviet pact and later, when autonomy was promised, for annexation of the Sudeten areas, involved also the establishment of its dominant influence in Czechoslovakia and the rest of Southeastern Europe. Hitler's final threat of war succeeded because of Germany's tactical strength, resulting from armament, the annexation of Austria, the support of Italy, and the unwillingness of Britain and France to risk war. His terms have made the "new Czechoslovakia" dependent on the Reich, and have led it to adopt Nazi economic and social policies.

It has been suggested that Czechoslovakia could have avoided partition by timely concessions to the Sudeten Germans. In view of Hitler's apparent determination in 1938 to impose his own solution, it seems doubtful that any concessions at that time could have staved off annexation much longer. A more liberal policy during earlier years might have removed much of the discontent which furnished the occasion for Germany's demands. The Sudeten Germans are, however, strongly nationalistic, and the existence across the frontier of a strong Germany was likely to make them dissatisfied, sooner or later, with their minority position in a predominantly Slavic state. In view of Germany's ambitions in Southeastern Europe, Czech leaders believed that they were confronted with a choice between relying on the maintenance of a preponderance of power by the European forces opposed to German expansion, and making a complete re-orientation toward Germany. In the crisis, however, France and the Soviet Union appeared unable to give aid quickly enough to save Prague from a destructive attack, and the British-French ultimatum of September 21 indicated a determination not to be drawn into war on Czechoslovakia's account. With such remote chances of ultimate support, Czechoslovakia had no choice but to submit to partition.

83. Cf. Wiskemann, *Czechs and Germans*, cited, p. 54.

84. In 1930 Lundenburg (Břeclav) contained 9,534 Czechs, and 2,028 Germans.

84a. *L'Europe Centrale*, October 15, 1938, pp. 663-65.

85. *New York Times*, October 9, 10, 11, 1938.

86. *Ibid.*, October 22, 1938.